

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-17

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E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PE

SUBJECT: VELASCO RESUMES PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTIONS, CRITICAL
PERIOD FOR MIL GOV ENSUES

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER MERCADO' S LIMITED PRESIDENTIAL
POWERS LAPSED AMID REASSURING PUBLIC REPORTS ON PRESIDENT
VELASCO' S CONDITION. OTHER SOUCES QUESTION WHETHER PRESIDENT
IS ABLE TO EXERT EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF GOVT. IF PRESENT SITUATION
WHERE IMPORTANT DECISIONS ARE BEING DELAYED IS PROTRACTED,
SERIOUS STRAINS WHICH AROSE WHEN VELASCO WAS CRITICAL COULD
RECUR.

1. THE DECREE LAW WHICH DELEGATED TO PRIME MINISTER MERCADO
LIMITED PRESIDENTIAL POWERS (LIMA 1640), ESSENTIALLY AUTHORITY
TO SIGN ROUTINE LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTS, EXPIRED
ON MARCH 31. THE NECESSITY OR DESIRABILITY OF EXTENDING THIS
AUTHORITY WAS NEVER BROACHED PUBLICLY AND PRESIDENT VELASCO
OSTENSIBLY RESUMES HIS OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS TODAY, APRIL 2, WITH
A NUMBER OF MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS. TOMORROW VELASCO
WILL PRESIDE OVER REGLAR TUESDAY CABINET MEETING, ALTHOUGH
THE FON MIN TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT THIS MEETING (TO BE HELD
AT THE HOSPITAL) WILL NOT ENTAIL THE NORMAL ALL DAY SESSION.
IT IS LARGELY SYMBOLIC.

2. MEANWHILE, GOVERMENT SOURCES CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE
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THE CONTINUED AND RAPID RECOVERY OF THE PRESIDENT. WEEKEND PAPERS HIGHLIGHTED PICTURES OF A SMILING BUT GAUNT VELASCO IN HIS HOSPITAL BED. TWO FRIENDLY JOURNALISTS HAVE ALREADY TALKED WITH THE PRESIDENT; EXPRESO COLUMNIST FRANCISCO MONCLOA (WHO LOST AN ARM IN A PRESS ACCIDENT LAST YEAR AND WHOSE WRITING IS EVEN MORE BITTER AGAINST THE OLD ORDER) AND FRANCISCO IGARTUA, DIRECTOR OF " OIGA", WEEKLY MAGAZINE THAT IS CONSISTENTLY SYMPATHETIC WITH MIL GOV. THE PRESS IN GENERAL HAS BEEN PROMISED EARLY ACCESS TO THE PRESIDENT.

3. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF SUNNY DAY IN A WANING SUMMER, VELASCO LEFT HOSPITAL FOR FIRST TIME ON SATUDAY ON TWO AND HALF HOUR DRIVE THROUGH LIMA TO CHACLACAYO, A RESORT TOWN ON ANDEAN SLOPES ABOUT 20 MILES UP CENTRAL HIGHWAY, WHERE VELASCO HAS HOUSE AND WHERE HE WILL COMPLETE HIS CONVALESCENCE UPON HIS DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL, REPORTEDLY IN ABOUT ONE WEEK. IN SUMMARY, ALL EXTERIOR INDICATIONS WOULD HAVE ONE BELIEVE THAT SITUATION IS PRACTICALLY BACK TO NORMAL.

4. OUTSIDE PUBLIC ARENA, HOWEVER, ATMOSPHERE IS QUITE DIFFERENT. NOTWITHSTANDING REASSURING REMARKS BY MINISTERS, A NUMBER OF REPORTS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE (SOME FROM MEDICAL SOURCES) TO EFFECT THAT VELASCO IS NEITHER PHYSICALLY NOR PSYCHOLOGICALLY " FIT" TO RESUME PRESIDENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, THAT FURTHER SURGERY REQUIRED ON TEFLON TUBE INSERTED IN AORTA, THAT UNDUE EXERTION COULD PROVE FATAL. WE FIND IT SIGNIFICANT THAT IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR, MERCADO HAS BEEN VERY INTERESTED IN PROGNOSSES OF AMERICAN PHYSICIANS WHO ATTENDED VELASCO. IT IS ALSO NOTABLE THAT DESPITE FANFARE GIVEN TO SPECIAL CUBAN REHABILITATION TEAM AND EQUIPMENT, MIL GOV HAS SOUNDED US OUT ON POSSIBLE HELP FROM WALTER REED HOSPITAL IN CONNECTION WITH PRESIDENT' S ARTIFICIAL LEG.

5. A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF GOVERNMENTAL PARALYSES IS NOTICEABLE WHERE ACTIONS CANNOT BE TAKEN BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT' S CONDITION. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THIS IS IRRITATING PROBLEM TOLD EMBASSY THAT FONOFF HAS NO READY SOLUTION OF WHAT TO DO WITH FIVE ENVOYS AWAITING APPOINTMENTS TO BE RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT. BULGARIAN AMBASSADOR- DESIGNATE ALREADY HAD CEREMONY SCHEDULED BEFORE VELASCO WAS STRICKEN. IN MEANTIME GDR, HONDURAN AND FED REP ENVOYS HAVE ARRIVED WHILE NEW ZEALANDER, WHO IS RESIDENT IN SANTIAGO, IS AWAITING CALL. WHILE PROBLEM IS NOT
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FUNDAMENTAL TO GOP' S FUNCTIONING, MATTER IS NEVERTHELESS

EMBARRASSING ONE AND IT HIGHLIGHTS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUNTA' S COMMUNIQUE GRANTING PRIME MINISTER AUTHORITY TO RECEIVE DIPLOMATIC AGENTS AND SUBSEQUENT DECREE WHICH OMITTED IT.

6. THE ENSUING WEEKS WILL BE CRUCIAL TO VELASCO GOVT. SINCE VELASCO IS FORMALLY IN CHARGE ONCE AGAIN, PEOPLE WILL EXPECT A RETURN TO NORMALCY-- AND PERHAPS MORE REVOLUTIONARY MEASURES, GIVEN THE RECENT SUPPORT OF VELASCO BY RADICAL ELEMENTS. THE MINISTRIES AND AGENCIES WILL EXPECT LEADERSHIP AND DECISIONS ON MATTERS THAT HAVE REMAINED PENDING FOR OVER 5 WEEKS. IF ON OTHER HAND PRESIDENT' S RECOVERY HAS BEEN EXAGGERATED AND HE REMAINS IN RELATIVE ISOLATION AT CHACLACAYO PERHAPS ONLY SIGNING ROUTINE DECREES APPROVED AT PERFUNCTORY SESSIONS OF CABINET, IT IS INEVITABLE THAT STRAINS WILL ARISE. THE STRESSES THAT WERE MANIFESTED WITHIN JUNTA, CABINET AND AMONG ARMED FORCES WHEN VELASCO WAS IN CRITICAL CONDITION ARE LIKELY TO RECUR. MERCADO, SUPPORTED BY PRESIDENT OF JOINT COMMAND CAVERO, REMAINS MOST LIKELY SUCCESSOR TO VELASCO BUT OTHER ACTORS COULD FIGURE IN ATTEMPT TO FILL POWER VACUUM.
BELCHER

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